The Australian 800 Series Telephone: 801 – 898.

John Paskulich WA Historic Telecommunications Society 2022

Introduction

Versions of this article by this author have appeared in the Australian telephone collectors' newsletter "The Exchange" and "Europe's Colourful Telephone Family" by German author Christoph T. M. Krause. It is not an exhaustive study but a general introduction to the 800 series telephone for novice collectors. The series persisted for 25 years between 1963 and 1988 and makes an interesting collecting genre.

Design and field trials of the Australian 800 occurred between 1961 and 1962 and the 801 model was officially launched by the Australian Post Office (APO) in January 1963. It was the first Australian-made ABS plastic telephone. The 801 was robustly built, with a steel base, electromechanical bells and electrical parts mounted on a printed circuit board.
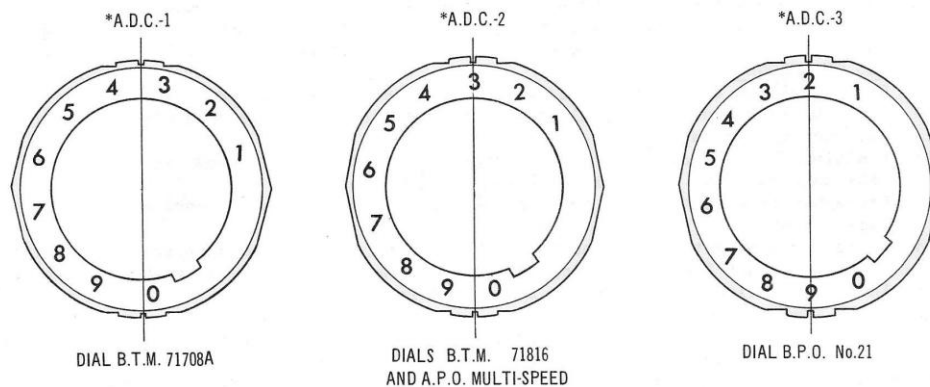
The 801

Aimed at the brighter 1960s Australian domestic décor, the initial colours were; light ivory, mist grey, fern green, topaz yellow and lacquer red. Black was added to the range later in 1964.

Various 801 telephones showing the colour range and some different dials (image John Paskulich)

Parts were supplied by AWA, STC, and the APO workshops. Initially, the rotary dials were not made in Australia but imported from European suppliers. They were the British Post Office BPO no. 21 and Belgian BTM71708 and BTM71816. The Australian made DMS-1 dial did not appear

until about 1970. All these dial had arrows (chaplets) on the dial plate pointing to the adjacent number on the adapter ring around the outside of the dial.

Different dial layouts (image source PMG Technicians Handbook 1969)

Because of the different layouts of the dials, it was necessary to supply each dial with its matching adapter ring to fit the 801 shell so there were noticeable differences between phones. These different dials created issues with maintenance and eventually led to the updated version, the 802, with a standardised dial, a simpler shell moulding and no number ring.

Inspiration

Along with many European telephones of the same era, the Australian 800 series telephone was inspired by the mid 1950s Belgian *BTMC "Assistant"* (also spelt Assist**e**nt). A number of European telephone companies also adopted the "Assistant" styling. Examples are shown below.

Mid 1950s Assistant telephone (image source "Electrical Communications" 1963)

L-R 1960s Spain "Heraldo" telephone, Germany FeTAp 61 (images source Pinterest)

The 802

1971 saw the release of the 802 *"Automatic Colorfone"*. This was fitted with the Australian made dial, DMS-2, which was similar to the DMS-1 except it had numbers, instead of arrows, printed on the dial plate. The 802 telephone was almost identical to the 801 except for the dial and lack of adaptor ring. The colour range was the same. A small batch of imported dials was also used in the 802 in the early 1970s and an updated DMS-3 dial appeared near the end of production in the early 1980s.

1970s 802 telephone (image John Paskulich)

Wallfone

1972 saw the introduction of the equivalent model 891 wall telephone, the *"Automatic WallFone"*. Initially the 891 was supplied in the colours; black, appliance white and powder blue. In 1976, the colours ebony brown, beige and maize yellow were added to the range. Also, the transparent dial finger plate and handset cradle were tinted from this time. In the mid-1980s, pushbutton versions 897/898 were introduced (discussed below in "Touchfone").

L-R Wallfones 891 (1972), 891 (1976) and pushbutton 897-898 (1985) (image John Paskulich)

Model variations
There were many minor updates and improvements to the rotary dial, 801, 802 and 891 models between inception in the early 1960s and end of production in the early 1980s. A "long-line" 802, with internal amplification and renamed the 804, was introduced in 1976. As well, there were numerous variants such as earth-recall push button, control-lock, deaf-aid versions etc. These updates and variants are far too numerous to list here. The variants are identifiable by their four-digit code. For example an 8028 is an 802 fitted with a control lock etc.

To add to collectors' confusion, various other applications existed outside normal telephony. For example, a two- way radio dispatcher's handset based on the 801, prison and elevator emergency wall phones, "Yellow Pages" survey phones etc.

Incidentally, misspelling "color" and "fone" was an advertising gimmick used by the APO through to Telstra and persisted in Australia into the late 1990s.

Touchfone
In about 1978, the first 800 series keypad telephones were introduced by Telecom Australia. Identified as the 805, but marketed as the *"Touchfone 10"*, they were similar to the earlier 802 dial phone except for the semi-mechanical, 10 digit, keypad and its matching case. The keypad simulated the original 10 digit rotary dial and only transmitted decadic dialling pulses.

By 1981, a 12 digit keypad was introduced *("Touchfone 12")*. The decadic version was still known as the 805. The 805 # and * buttons were only used within the phone for last number redial and to cancel it, respectively. At around the same time the 806 *("Touchfone 12")* appeared, the first Australian made DTMF (tone dialling) telephone. The 806 operated the same as present day DTMF phones.

Apart from the keypad, the 805/806 shared the same basic technology with the earlier 801/802 models - steel base, electromechanical bells and printed circuit board. The 805 and 806 telephone colour ranges were very different to the 801/802. The cheerful, bright colours gave way to muted tones - ivory, grey, brown, bone and sandstone.

Between 1984 and 1988 there was a major redesign of the 800 series telephones. Although still marketed as *"Touchfone 12"* and externally similar in appearance to the earlier models, the 807 (decadic), 8081 (DTMF) and 809 (switchable - decadic and DTMF) had very different construction and technology with an all-plastic case, handset and base, an electronic ringer, advanced electronics and a volume control. New colours were offered but still in muted pastel tones. At the same time, the "WallFone" was also updated using all-plastic construction and

electronics and keypads similar to the 807-809. Model 897 was the decadic version and 898 the DTMF.

L-R: 805 Touchfone 10, 805-806 Touchfone 12 and 807-809 Touchfone 12 (image John Paskulich)

Conclusion

In closing, between 1963 and 1988, the 800 series models were 801, 802, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 891, 897 and 898 (there is no evidence of an 803). As well, other special versions existed for private applications like survey phones, elevator phones etc. There were several different dials used over time and many variants such as CB (no dial), key-lock, deaf-aid, recall button etc. As well, more than 20 different colours appeared across the models' lifetime. To collect an example of every combination of dial type, colour, optional function and model would be a major undertaking.

Information sources for this article included:
- Bob Estreich - Website http://www.telephonecollecting.org/Bobs%20phones/
- Denys Parker - Article "The 800 Colorfone - Problems & Fixes"
- Bob Mills - Article "801 vs 802"
- W Gruger, H Van Holst - "Assistant Type Telephone Set - Electrical Communication 1963"
- Australian Post Office and Telecom Australia -Various technical documents